Mr. President, we are facing a number of challenges in

the Senate and in the Congress, but none is more important than our

willingness and our responsibility to properly support the men and

women in our Armed Forces who are serving us today in Iraq and

Afghanistan; serving us because we voted to send them there, doing the

policy of the United States that has the support of the President, the

Chief Executive, the Commander in Chief, and that has been supported by

the Congress.

Yes, we have had a lot of debate, a lot of dissension, and a lot of

complaints, but when the chips have been down, time and time again we

have authorized and funded the activities that are going on now in the

name of the United States of America in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

We had an election last fall. We have heard people talk about that.

But the American people did not say: We want to pull out of Iraq

regardless of the consequences. They said they were not happy, and none

of us were happy with the way things were going.

It seemed to be drifting in a bad way, and there seemed to be no

positive results coming. So we had, after this election, last spring,

April and May, a big debate about it. And President Bush said: We need

to change policy. I am going to send a new general over there, General

Petraeus, and we are going to change tactics, and I am going to ask you

to approve additional troops. I am asking for a surge in troops.

So we talked about it. We debated it right here in the Senate. This

great Nation's legislative branch responded to the President's call and

had a debate on it. We had no obligation to fund that. None whatsoever.

But earlier in the summer, we voted 80 to 14 to fund the surge in Iraq

and to send General Petraeus and to give him a chance to utilize a new

tactic and a new strategy for confronting the terrorist forces we were

facing there, in particular al-Qaida, which was a strong entity at that

time.

I have got to tell you, I was worried things had not gone as well as

we had expected. We had had a bad year, and casualties were up and

attacks were up and it was a tough time. But as part of that debate, we

asked General Petraeus to come back in September and give us a report.

My Democratic colleagues and others, all of us were concerned. We

wanted a report to see how things were going because we were not going

to have a blank check and unended obligation to Iraq if things were not

going to work.

That is a fundamental synopsis of the situation. I believe that is a

fair analysis. So General Petraeus came back and gave us his report.

General Jimmy Jones had been sent and a group of other independent

evaluators with experience in military matters.

That commission was sent over there at the direction of Congress.

When we passed the supplemental to fund General Petraeus and the surge,

we required another report, not just General Petraeus, but the Jones

Commission to come back and make a report. We asked the General

Accounting Office to do an evaluation also, the independent GAO.

So they all came back in September. We had hearings and debate and

suggestions and we continued to go forward. We voted, in essence, to

continue to allow General Petraeus to pursue the plans he was carrying

out. Some progress had been made. It was notable, but it was not

sufficient for us to say with certainty that a major change positively

had occurred. We could not be certain of that. But it looked as if some

progress was being made with more troops and new tactics.

So we said then: Let's go forward. And we did. Now we have seen some

very dramatic positive developments in Iraq. The Iraqi people, by all

accounts, I think few can dispute this, have believed the American

troops are reliable allies. We have changed our tactics in how we deal

with the local Iraqi officials and tribal leaders and mayors and chiefs

of police.

We are doing a much better job--General Petraeus is--of partnering

with them. They have turned against al-Qaida, Osama bin Laden's troops,

that terrorist group they thought was going to take over Iraq. And Al

Anbar, the worst area in Iraq for al-Qaida, has made a transformation.

Al-Qaida is on the run throughout Iraq. Violence is down substantially.

Can I guarantee you it will continue to go down? I cannot. I can tell

you that deaths of American soldiers are down by two-thirds this last

month; and attacks on Iraqi civilians, which always cost more lives

than attacks on our American soldiers, are down by a similar margin.

Attacks on Iraqi soldiers are also down.

Al-Qaida has virtually been removed. Sadr's group has quieted down

and

seems to be working with the Government. The Government has not

performed like we would like it to. The Parliament, they have not

performed like I would like to see them perform. I think they deserve

criticism for that. But it is not an easy thing for them to do, just to

walk in and reach agreements that affect the future of Iraq and the oil

revenue and military power within Iraq for generations to come.

It is understandable they would be somewhat reluctant. But they need

to do better. But, fundamentally, as of this date, things are so much

better than they were in April and May, and so much better even than

they were in September. That is quite remarkable. No one, I think, can

deny that.

We are a great nation. We have a great Congress. And we went through

a national post-election discussion about what to do. Were we just

going to pull out regardless of the consequences? Were we going to give

General Petraeus a chance to employ new tactics? We voted to give him a

chance. It is beginning to work better than I think any of us would

have predicted so far. It is rather dramatic.

So I would say to my colleagues, at this point in time, for goodness'

sake, let's not now start cutting back on the ability of our soldiers

to have the resources they need to continue what they are doing. Let's

not try to pass legislation that directs General Petraeus how to

conduct operations in Iraq.

What do a group of politicians in a dysfunctional Congress have to

offer to one of the most brilliant generals this Nation has ever

produced, General Petraeus? In a few short months he has achieved

dramatic progress there.

We are committed there. Our soldiers are committed. They are serving

us now. I had an e-mail the other day sent to me from a relative of a

soldier in Iraq. He was saying things are better. The only concern he

had was what the Congress would do, whether we would pull the rug out

from under them, if we are going to deny them the resources they need

to continue the progress. After all this effort, to walk away from what

we have done is, to me, unthinkable.

We are at a point now where instead of giving a supplemental that

will allow the military to plan the year's activities, plan to go

forward with, as you know, General Petraeus's commitment to reduce

troops by next summer, we are talking about a $50 billion supplemental

with all kinds of strings attached to it. The President is not going to

accept it. He cannot accept it. He is not going to accept it. So for us

to continue to pursue a supplemental with excessive strings attached

that is too small, leaves the military uncertain of the support of the

American people and the Congress is a bad thing for us to do. It really

is. It is not good.

Well, they say, let's keep the military out there. Let's let them

know we are watching them. We are going to keep control of them instead

of giving them the funding they need for a year or more. Let's do it a

few months at a time. Then we can bring them in here, and we can beat

them up. We can appeal to our antiwar people out in the country and let

them know we are fighting for them, and we will do all these things.

And it won't hurt anything.

But it does hurt. If you were walking the streets in Baghdad right

now attempting to execute the policy of the United States, placing your

life at risk, does it not make any difference to you whether Congress

is behind you? I think it does make a difference. While questioning

General Casey yesterday, the chief of staff of the Army, former

commander in Iraq, I said, I am concerned that what we are doing is

going to undermine the confidence American soldiers have in the support

they have at home. It will embolden the enemy and make our allies less

certain of our commitment. I said, I know you don't want to be drawn

into a political debate, but that seems to be the situation. He summed

it up this way. He said:

Doesn't it send the wrong message that we can't, after a full debate

this summer, now continue for a few months to support our troops? They

are in the field now. Why stand we here idle? Why are we not doing our

part to show them the support they need? We will watch this situation

in Iraq. If it gets worse and things are not moving effectively, then

we ought to, as a Congress, continue to consider whether to remove our

troops, to cut off funding. But that is not what we are going to do. We

are not going to cut off funding for our troops while they are making

the kind of progress they are making. It is not going to happen. So if

we are going to actually follow through eventually and give this money

to them, why don't we do it in a way that helps them to be even more

successful instead of doing it in a way that makes it more difficult

for them and places our soldiers and troops at greater risk?

This is what the Deputy Secretary of Defense wrote a few days ago,

November 8, about the budget situation we are now in. Yes, we did pass

a Defense appropriations bill. But we funded the military effort in

Iraq and Afghanistan by separate supplemental appropriations. It allows

us to have more control over what is actually being spent on the war

effort to do it separately. He wrote this letter. This is Secretary

Gordon England:

He goes on to say:

If you were Secretary of Defense, what would you do if you have

soldiers in the field authorized by the Congress, authorized by the

Commander in Chief, and you run out of money? You have to lay off your

civilian personnel, and you have to get the money to the soldiers whose

lives are at risk.

Secretary England goes on to say:

These are not idle threats. The money is running out. We ought not to

be dangling the Defense Department out there, leaving them hanging with

uncertainty, having them spend hours and hours figuring out how they

are going to juggle personnel, developing plans to lay off nonessential

civilian personnel, although I suppose in some sense are all essential,

but laying off civilian personnel and canceling contracts. It will

result in substantial expense to the Government for penalties and that

kind of thing. We ought not to be doing that.

This is what Secretary of the Army Geren said yesterday at the Armed

Services Committee hearing:

Committee, asked this of General Casey. General Casey is the chief of

staff of the Army. He asked:

Senator Thune goes on:

This is what General Casey said, a career military man:

General Casey:

So I hope in the weeks to come our leaders in the Senate will begin

to work together in a way that can allow us to approve this funding--

that I think with certainty we will ultimately approve--sooner rather

than later and not go through this painful exercise.

I have to say, I really think it would be a lot better for our

country, I think it would be a lot better for our military, I think it

would be a lot better for our allies, and I think it would put us in a

much better position against our enemies if the leader of the Senate,

the majority leader, would quit saying this is a doomed, failed effort.

It is not helpful.

We have voted to support this effort, and we do not need to be saying

publicly it is not going to work when, in fact, we are achieving more

success today than any of us would have thought possible just a few

weeks ago.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.